Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

Posted on 1 September 2011

We are asking these questions as a way of kick-starting a conversation between Australians about what you think is important for national progress.

What do you think about when you hear the phrases 'Life in Australia' and 'national progress'? They reflect very broad ideas, made up of many experiences, issues and aspirations. One way to break down these broad ideas, is to think about **what social, economic and environmental** aspects are important to our way of life. Are there other areas that are important too, such as the systems that help our country operate?

Social areas of interest

Some aspects of society that may be important to consider when measuring national progress are **families, health and education**. But there are likely to be many others. Society is a broad concept in its own right and any 'progress' measurement will need to take into account the wide range of issues that people care about and want to see progress on. What are the important aspects of society that you think we need to take into account when measuring progress?

We'd also like to know your goals and aspirations for Australia's progress across the important areas of Australia's society. After all, we need to know what we are progressing towards in order to know that we are progressing.

Have your say today.

Helen

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#1 Marie

2/09/2011 10:00:44 AM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

I think the needs of middle aged Australians (45-65 age groups) requires further research because I noted that the media reports that baby boomers have wealth and assets whereas the younger generations are not as lucky. I think that the real picture is masked because there is increasing knowledge that many middle aged Australians are taking on more responsibilities caring for their ageing parents and their grandchildren, also many of their adult children remain home longer, which means that there is more pressure on them to carry the burden of care. furthermore their ability to earn incomeof any sort is reduced due to these caring responsibilities. I also think there is a lack of appropriate social activities on offer for this group of Australians, if there are any they are not well advertised in comparison to social activities for younger cohorts. For me as we are having a growing ageing population as reported by the statistics, an increasing awareness of keeping healthy includes providing for this group in the Australian population.

Thank you

Marie

#2 Graham Pearce

2/09/2011 11:06:20 AM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

The notion of “Progress”

If we want to try and define “progress” it has to be related to a particular part of our lives eg. Economic, social or environmental. Some might even include spiritual in the mix.

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Having defined the area of discussion its much easier to drill down to the nitty gritty of what we think equates to progress in the field of interest. For instance the discussion might centre on the benefits of renewable energy over other methods of delivering base load power.

However, I believe that its quite pointless discussing our progress in the field of technology if we lack equal progress in the form of social cohesiveness. No matter how clever we may be technically, if we can't keep our communities functioning with mutual respect, compassion, discipline and a sense of belonging, nothing else will matter. Man is incredibly smart and sophisticated when it comes to going to the moon, but he becomes a dumb bumbling idiot in his inability to live in harmony with his fellow man.

Technology has given us a very comfortable materialistic lifestyle but it has the downside of alienating children from their parents. Very young children are now way ahead of their parents in the understanding and use of the electronic communication tools available to them. Such mastery leads them to think that they are more intelligent and knowledgeable than the parents which, in turn, leads to a lack of respect and discipline, especially where parents allow themselves to be intimidated by their "clever" kids.

If what is happening widens out into the community as a whole within neighbourhoods, then cities, nations and then globally, we have a real problem the likes of which is evident in the UK now. Such apathy has the capacity to bring western democratic cultures to their knees and even destroy them altogether, as has happened to other great civilisations in the past.

So, progress in the field of human endeavour will simply depend on whether man can keep the family unit together through demonstrative affection, mutual respect, compassion and discipline, both externally and self applied.

Graham Pearce

3/9/2011

#3 John Ellis
2/09/2011 12:58:01 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

How wonderful it is that this Agency starts of a discussion with such an open agenda. This will surely make a useful contribution to "Sustainabilty"?

To add to, Families, Health , Education,

I'd put these -

Care of environment.while providing access to it.

Political empowerment .

Freedom of thought and expression.

Protection of the disadvantaged (young, elderly, mentally or physically disabled, exiled, addicted).

Elimination of discrimination, (includes freedom of opportunity.

Equal access to law for poor and rich.

Public law and order.

Fostering of cultural and artistic activity

Communication, transportation and entertainment (for the masses!)

Fostering of productive business and employment opportunities.

Elimination of corruption and favouritism, fair pay for fair work.

Could all these be combined in a mathematical equation?

#4 Brian E
2/09/2011 3:06:43 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

Australia is getting better. Why? Looking back in history shows us that even when times have been good we learn either the good or the bad of changes. This is usually inevitable. If we don't learn from our experiences we can't get better. it appears to me that Australian

term, 'battler' is a realistic term for how Australians have grown over the last 50-60 years. Australia will get better even though I think that right now, Australia being the envy of other nations, we have it (life) very good. This does not mean that it can't get better.

Some points of need: (not in any order of preference)

1 We do need a better way with helping people from other nations who want to come live here. The government is too slow on this issue. No nation will get better without respect and cooperation.

2. Stop the greediness of the rich enterprises, who reward their top executives, without compassion for their employees or stake

holders.

3, Manufacturing needs to lifted up as vital for growth. We seem to be more reliant on financial investment than on creating ways of earning. The more manufacturing the more jobs will be created. If people can't find work then they become more dependent on government support, which in my estimation we can't afford to continue.

4. The politicians need to be more respectful of the people. At this time they seem intent on preserving their jobs rather than listening to each other. What is happening now is detrimental to the national psyche. ,

#5 Claire Leslie
5/09/2011 12:51:30 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

There is a view doing the rounds in recent years that, in the early 21st Century, in Australia, the emancipation of women is complete. This view does not stand up to any scrutiny - including statistical. One of the unfortunate consequences of this belief is tat institutions are, today, far less likely to scrutinise this issue explicitly than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Under "Society" MAP needs another category (Status of Women) measuing women's progress. This category would include statistics on: [Women's] Health, Education, Income, Superannuation, Domestic violence, representation among the highly advantaged/ powerful and the highly disadvantaged/powerless, experiences of parenthood (and I'm sure you can think of many more). Although a number of these topics are covered in other areas (e.g. health, education, crime), they need to be brought together in order o strt to give a picture of our progress towards female emancipation.

#6 Bob Couch, Convenor, Stop Population Growth Party
5/09/2011 6:29:28 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

Quality of life in Australia is getting worse. The main cause is unnecessary population growth. This is leading to more and more water restrictions, degadation of our fisheries and wild life, choked roads, overloaded hospitals, use of good food growing farmland for housing, unaffordable housing, and much much more.

Projected population growth endorsed by both the Labour and Liberal Governments will easily wipe out environmentalbenefits to be gained from the carbon tax..

It is not necessary to grow our population in order to prosper. Look at Denmark and Sweden.

It is going top be hard enough to cope with coming shortages of oil and phosphates (essential for growing food) without burdening ourselves with more people.

We will know life is getting better when we have confidence our Government is taking notice of the above, and acting accordingly.

#7 CT
6/09/2011 8:47:33 AM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

Importantly, while economic and environmental factors play a big part in how Australia is progressing, I also believe it is important to see how Australia is faring on the social justice front.

Unfortunately, I'm not too sure how collected statistics can portray how we are faring (both on the world stage and internally) but two parts of Australian society that are important to myself (as a Gen Y) and to many other Australians are:

*Asylum seekers/Refugees - how we fare against the rest of the world for intake of refugees

*Equality - gender pay equality, same sex marriage and relationship equality, the gap between rich and poor

Cheers,

CT

#8 Watermelon
12/09/2011 2:28:16 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

In simple terms 'No'. Today's Australians pay more earn less economically, healthier by perusing an active lifestyle physically and perform poorly in education. In one generation I have seen the Australian lifestyle slip into a consumer society that performs menial tasks for greater gains.

Our largest industry, mining underwent a change from technical tunnel mining to open cut mining. Farming has failed to make any gains. Fishing industry relies on foreign imports. Livestock has moved to supply live animals to foreign abettors. Australian transportation industry relies on foreign suppliers; maintenance infers wholesale component replacement rather than repair. Australian homes are of simple construction, servery unaffordable and Australian purchase household goods of poor quality.

Australians enjoy a good outdoor life however, this is more attributed to the natural environment rather than any form of progress. One could argue that the natural environment has deteriorated over the years due to farming but the vast majority of land remains vacant.

The education system beyond the legal obligation to attend year 10 is not required for the majority of jobs in Australia. Even with incentives Australians don't feel the need to attend further Universities, Universities in Australia tend to cater to foreign students.

#9 Andy Moore
14/09/2011 12:13:48 AM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

Re: Bob Couch - population

I strongly disagree with the position 'stop population growth'.

All the points you raise are related to infrastructure constraints and poor environmental management. These can be readily improved with adequate land value capture and reinvestment. The ABS should place emphasis on collecting data related to 'community created value' ie unimproved land rents. If the public knew how much community value was being transferred to private interests - which instead could alleviate all the resource constraints that create our intolerance, we'd be likely get together and do something about it.

Australians are an honest, considerate and hard working bunch. If the ABS really wanted to improve 'social, economic and environmental outcomes' the best place to start would be quantifying the land and resource rents. Its about time the neo-classical model was superceded.

The Geo Classical model is the best framework for this:

Inputs Outputs

Labour Human Inputs Wages

Capital Products used in production Interest

Land Surface of the globe Land Rent

Natural Resources Either side of surface Resource Rent

Institutions Rent Seeking Economic Rent

Source: David Smiley 'Crumbling Foundations' 2010

#10 Liz Denborough
2/10/2011 12:07:44 PM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

I suppose I view life in Australia as how consensus ideas are playing out.. I feel that life gets better when the population shows an ability to be aware of our super privilege and think of more than our own material wants. Australia gets better when people are thinking of the

wellbeing of future generations and the planet in general. At this point in Australian history we have a battle of ideas on many issues.

Australia will get better if we cease contributing to invasions of other countries for resources and therefore produce fewer refugees.

Australia will get better when we cease contributing to rapid climate change and instead embrace clean and safe (non-nuclear) renewable e nergy production.

Australia will get better when we reverse the trend of making education less accessable and corporatised and see the importance of an informed population.

In my view we are at a critical time and it remains to be seen if life in Australia will get better or lose out to actions based on short term financial gain and an inability to think and act both rationally and from the heart..

#11 Kipling
7/10/2011 10:11:31 AM Is life in Australia getting better? How will we know if it is?

It appears better due to material gains, however, I don't think life is actually improving all that greatly.

Measuring how we provide care for the most vulnerable, in particular our elderly and our children as a society would be excellent indicators as to how we are "progressing".

The treatment and care of animals, whilst it may seem unrelated, also seem an excellent measure of how we are shaping up as a civilised society and our progress (if any).

Statistics relating to our undermining our environment both directly and indirectly would be far more edifying than economic measures, particularly when one considers how often we here how well we are doing economically, yet, real people have significant struggles meeting some of the most basic economic needs. Or at least this seems to be the reality, perhaps statistics may demonstrate otherwise, however, until they are collected, collated and analysed one can only guess.

Impacts of foreign investment must be measurable and would provide excellent information.

Is it possible to measure the long term impacts also of privatisation, specifically in terms of maintaining or improving service provision, provision of ongoing skills training and keeping costs down for the people accessing the services that were once public assets?

The overall picture seems to require a mix of social measurements and economic measurements covering a much wider range than have previously been done.

Further, is the ABS specifically only seeking statistics that demonstrate growth or statistics that demonstrate if there has been growth or in fact if we have (as a society) gone a bit backwards in some fairly important areas i.e. community building, support and maintenance.

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